



(U//FOUO) Interview with... Jim Cusick, SID/Assistant Deputy Director for Data Acquisition (S3)

FROM: Jim Cusick
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Run Date: 08/05/2004

- What was your first job at the Agency?

(S//SI) My first job at the Agency was intercepting Caesar's legions from a hilltop in Gaul. Actually, I am not quite that old. I began my journey at NSA in 1972 as a Language Intern when the Panel was chaired by the legendary [REDACTED]. My language was German and in those days all discrete German intercept was prosecuted in the German Branch of the European Communist (EURCOM) North Division, so a German intern rotated from team to team within the same branch for three years.

(S//SI) Having served as the NCOIC* of the Field Station Berlin East German Socialist Unity Party (SED) Section, I had some experience working this target and began as an analyst/linguist/reporter doing term studies (contrary to what you read in the press, we did term analysis in the Dark Ages) based on huge volumes of discrete SED reporting. Listening to the SED Politburo, Secretariat and Central Committee on the full gamut of issues any country deals with was fascinating. I had to keep pinching myself to make sure I wasn't just dreaming that they were actually paying me the staggering sum of \$11,043/year to work with the language I had studied for 10 years. No one should have that much fun without gaining weight or breaking a law.

- (U) What are some of the best opportunities you've had in your career?

(U//FOUO) Quite some time ago, I let it be known to NSA leadership that I was willing to take on virtually any task as long as it was in the middle of the fray, it was challenging, and it made a difference. Remember the old caution "Be careful what you ask for?" As a result, I have been blessed with more opportunities than anyone has a right to dream of. Being a Senior Operations Officer in NSOC has to rank as the best job in SIGINT by orders of magnitude. Serving as VADM McConnell's Civilian Assistant was easily the best learning experience of my career. Heading up Unconventional Operations and managing NSA's largest budget category was the hardest and most demanding job I ever took on. Representing Lt Gen Hayden at the Pentagon during the aftermath of 9/11 and during Operation Iraqi Freedom was fascinating and added a whole new perspective on support to the warfighter and national-tactical integration. Walking out your door and running into a Boy Scout Troop or a group of senior foreign military officers takes some getting used to.

(U//FOUO) My 2.5 years representing NSA on the National Intelligence Collection Board opened my eyes to what the rest of the Intelligence Community (IC) was doing on a daily basis and earned me the coveted CACO, the Charlie Allen* Control Officer, moniker. For the record, collaboration across the IC may not be perfect but has been going on non-stop for decades and I never encountered anyone who thought ignoring or slow rolling a directive from the DCI was an option. Chairing the Intelligence Analysis Career Panel reconnected me with my intern roots and allowed me to assist in providing a solid foundation for NSA's most important resource: its employees. My five tours outside the building exposed me to experiences, techniques, leadership styles, and cultures that shaped everything I have done and the way I have conducted myself.

- (U) What has been the biggest change you've seen in the Agency during your career?

(U//FOUO) The biggest change has been the composition of the workforce and the leadership of the Agency. When I was hired, some incredibly large -- I don't know the figure but if I had to guess I would estimate that 85-90 percent would not be an exaggeration -- portion of the workforce was recruited from what we now call the Service Cryptologic Elements. Inasmuch as

there were almost no women or persons of color in the ranks of the Army Security Agency (ASA), the Naval Security Group (NSG), and the Air Force Security Service (AFSS), there were very few women or persons of color at NSA when I came on board.

(U//FOUO) Sweeping changes in both military and civilian recruitment during the 70s changed all that. The workforce and the leadership I see in the halls and in leadership fora are exceptionally diverse and we are a far better NSA than we were 32 years ago. I am loath to even begin to think how much less capable to meet the challenges of the future we would be without outstanding people like [REDACTED] Carl Johnson, [REDACTED], and Sherri Ramsay just to name some of the very best who immediately spring to mind.

- (U) What was the most memorable experience you've had during your career?

(U//FOUO) Given my German language background and having lived in West Berlin for 11 years, the most memorable experience in my career was the destruction of the Berlin Wall. Keen analyst that I am, I would have bet you 10 years pay that the wall would never come down. Unless you lived under its sinister shadow and within its confines, it is hard to truly appreciate the meaning of that event.

*(U) Notes:

NCOIC = Noncommissioned Officer-in-Charge

Charlie Allen is the Assistant Director of Central Intelligence for Collection

(U) See other interviews in this series:

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